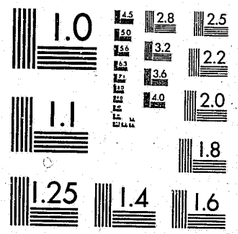

The Frequency of Nonnarcotic Drug Use and Its Relationship to Criminal Activity Among Narcotic Addicts

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ABSTRACT

Using confidential interview data obtained from 354 male narcotic addicts residing within the Baltimore metropolitan area, both the frequency with which various nonnarcotic drugs were used and the relationship of such use to the commission of different types of crime were investigated. Frequency and type of nonnarcotic drugs used were found to be a joint function of race (Black/White) and current narcotic addiction status (addicted/not addicted). Similarly, the relationship of such use to the commission of different types of crime depended on race and narcotic addiction status. Interestingly enough, members of both races tended to use more nonnarcotic drugs during periods of active addiction to narcotics than during periods of nonaddiction. Bivariate and multiple correlational analyses provided evidence that higher rates of use of certain nonnarcotic drugs were associated with higher rates of commission of certain types of crime; however, a cause and effect relationship cannot, of course, be proven.

That a substantial relationship exists between criminal activity and the illegal use of narcotic drugs no longer seems open to question. The results of numerous studies, including those by Ball, Shaffer, and Nurco,[1] Chaiken and Chaiken,[2] Inciardi,[3] McGlothlin, Anglin, and Wilson,[4] and Preble and Casey,[5] to mention but a few, all attest to the existence of a narcotics/crime relationship. Much of this information has been integrated and discussed by Austin and Lettieri,[6] Inciardi,[7] and Nurco et al.[8] The existence of a statistical association does not, of course, prove a causal relationship as numerous authors have pointed out. Moreover, narcotic addicts are clearly not a homogeneous group,[9] so any generalizations made will frequently not apply to individuals. In many instances, criminal activities precede addiction to narcotics by several years, while the reverse sequence holds true in other cases. Some individuals commit a great deal of crime regardless of whether or not they are actively addicted to narcotics, while others commit relatively small numbers of crimes which are obviously related to their need to purchase drugs. Despite such caveats, Ball and his associates have conclusively shown that crime rates among narcotic addicts are substantially higher during periods of active addiction than during periods of nonaddiction. In this sense, then, narcotic drugs may be said to "drive" crime.

The situation is somewhat less clear with respect to nonnarcotic

drugs. Gandossy et al.,[10] in their survey and analysis of the relevant literature, found the evidence linking the use of various nonnarcotic drugs to crime to be rather meagre. Some of the available findings would appear to be contradictory; however, the bulk of the evidence with respect to several nonnarcotic substances, e.g., hallucinogens, marijuana, and cocaine, would suggest that no clear relationship between use and criminal activity has as yet been established. The picture is further clouded by the fact that various narcotic and nonnarcotic drugs are often used in combination, and disentangling their joint relationship to criminal behavior, let alone the issue of cause and effect, is extremely problematical. Moreover, there would appear to be few if any studies that compared crime rates during periods of active use with crime rates during periods of abstinence. More recently, Inciardi,[11] in a study of the prevalence of crime among nonnarcotic drug users in Miami, Florida, found a high prevalence and diversity of criminal activities among such persons; however, this prevalence was not as great as that found among narcotic drug users.

In view of the above, the present series of analyses were undertaken to explore both the frequency of use and the relationships between the use of certain nonnarcotic substances and specific types of criminal activities within a sample of narcotic addicts. Since the frequency of such use varies by race (Black/White) as well as by active addiction status (addicted/not addicted to narcotics), separate analyses were performed for all four

of these joint conditions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects

Between July 1973 and January 1978, detailed confidential interviews were conducted with 354 male narcotic (principally heroin) addicts from the Baltimore metropolitan area. These 354 addicts represented a stratified random sample from a population of 6,149 known narcotic users arrested (or identified) by the Baltimore police department between 1952 and 1976. The sample was unselected for criminality but stratified by race and year of police contact. Over 90% of the men selected were actually interviewed, usually at study offices. Subjects were paid $15.00 for their participation, and the confidentiality of all information obtained is protected by Maryland law. Of the 354 subjects, 195 were Black and 159 were White. Mean age at interview was 34.1 years, with a standard deviation of 7.9 years.

To be eligible for inclusion in the study, subjects had to have used narcotics on at least four separate days a week for a period of at least one month while at large in the community. Since a major purpose of the interview was to obtain detailed chronological information concerning crime and narcotic addiction from the time of first regular narcotic use to the time of interview, each subject was asked to describe in detail his addiction, abstinence, and incarceration periods, with the criteria for successive periods of addiction being the same as that for inclusion in the study.

In a similar manner, each subject was asked to recount his illegal sources of income during each addiction and nonaddiction period, a reconstruction that involved an enumeration of specific offenses committed on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. This reconstruction of criminal activity was facilitated by interview probes and cross-checks that emphasized circumscribed time periods, places of residence, and friends and associates during each period.

Criminal Activity Measures

In a previous paper,[1] the authors have described several different measures of criminal activity, all of which embody the concept of crime-days per year at risk. Conceptually, a crime-day is defined as a 24-hour period during which one or more crimes of a specific type is committed by a given individual. Thus, a crime-days measure tends to be a conservative estimate of the amount of crime actually committed, since multiple offenses committed on a single day still constitute only a single crime-day of a specified type.

In keeping with this previous research, all crimes reported were placed into one of five categories, and the total number of days that each subject committed one or more crimes while actively addicted to narcotics was estimated for each category. Similar estimations regarding crimes committed while subjects were not actively addicted to narcotics were also made. The five crime-days measures, all of which refer conceptually to 24-hour periods during which one or more crimes of the type

specified were committed, are as follows: Crime-Days Theft (includes all property thefts not involving violence to persons, such as shoplifting, larceny, and burglary); Crime-Days Violence (includes all crimes involving physical violence against persons, such as robbery, assault, and murder); Crime-Days Dealing (involves sales of all illegal drugs--mere drug use or possession not included as crimes); Crime-Days Confidence Games (includes forgery of checks and drug prescriptions as well as all confidence games); and Crime-Days Other (includes all offenses not included in the previous four categories, especially illegal gambling, pimping, and selling stolen goods).

Each of the above five crime-days measures was further refined by **annualizing**, i.e., the total number of crime-days accumulated by each subject in each category while at large in the community (days incarcerated or hospitalized excluded) and actively addicted to narcotics was expressed as **crime-days per year at risk** by taking the ratio of crime-days to total days at large and multiplying by 365. Similar calculations were performed for each subject with regard to total time at large during which he was **not** actively addicted to narcotics. Thus, criminal activity in each of the five areas was expressed as a yearly rate which in this sense is independent of actual length of time at large in the community. Through the use of such measures, it becomes possible to compare rates for different individuals and for different types of crime, even though the actual time at large may vary considerably.

Finally, as an overall measure of criminal activity, total crime-days per year at risk was calculated for each subject by summing his five separate crime-days measures. Since crimes of different types were frequently committed during the same 24-hour period, individual totals often exceeded 365.

Nonnarcotic Drug Use Measures

As noted earlier, all of the participants in this study met the operational criteria for narcotic addiction, although many had periods of nonaddiction to narcotics and/or were not actively addicted at the time of interview. All subjects were also extensively questioned concerning their use of nonnarcotic substances during each period of narcotic addiction or nonaddiction. Afterward, use of each nonnarcotic drug was expressed for each subject as a rate, i.e., number of times used per year at risk, for each period separately as well as for all addiction periods combined and for all nonaddiction periods combined. It should be noted in this connection that the nonnarcotic drug use measures, unlike the criminal activity measures, incorporated multiple uses of a specific drug, or class of drugs, on a given day in calculating rates of use.

Statistical Analysis

Rates of use for each type of nonnarcotic drug were calculated for each subject, and the means, standard deviations, and ranges of use were computed by race as well as by total periods of active narcotic addiction and total periods of nonaddiction to narcotics. Mean differences between races and addiction/non-

addiction periods in rates of use of specific types of drugs were tested univariately for statistical significance by Student's t. Relationships between each of the six crime-days measures and the 16 nonnarcotic drug use measures were explored by forming the product-moment intercorrelation matrix by race and by total addiction/nonaddiction periods separately. Afterward, four series of multiple regression equations were formed, again separately by race and by total addiction/nonaddiction periods, in which each of the crime-days measures served as the dependent variable in turn and subsets of the nonnarcotic drug use measures served as the independent variables.

RESULTS

Frequency of Nonnarcotic Drug Use

Table 1 presents, separately by race, summarizing statistics for 14 types of nonnarcotic drugs used during periods of active narcotic addiction. Statistics pertaining to a small, miscellaneous category as well as to all nonnarcotic drugs combined are also provided. Inspection of Table 1 reveals that among Blacks, marijuana was the most frequently used nonnarcotic drug, followed by cocaine, barbiturates, and benzodiazepines. Among Whites, cocaine was the most frequently used substance, followed by marijuana, barbiturates, amphetamines, benzodiazepines, and quaaludes. Mean differences between the two races were statistically significant only for barbiturates and amphetamines--Whites being the heavier users. For most of these substances, variations in frequency of use were considerable, both within and across

races.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Table 2 presents summarizing statistics analogous to those shown in Table 1; here, however, the statistics refer to periods of nonaddiction to narcotics. The sample sizes also differ, since 30 Blacks and five Whites had no periods of nonaddiction to narcotics. As was also the case during periods of active addiction, marijuana was the most frequently used nonnarcotic drug among Blacks, followed by cocaine, barbiturates, and benzodiazepines. Among Whites, the pattern changed somewhat during periods of nonaddiction in that marijuana was now the most frequently used nonnarcotic drug followed by barbiturates, cocaine, benzodiazepines, amphetamines, hallucinogens, and quaaludes. Mean differences between the races were univariately significant with respect to amphetamines, barbiturates, and benzodiazepines, with Whites having the higher frequency of use in each instance.

Insert Table 2 about here.

In comparing the frequency with which the various nonnarcotic drugs were used during periods of addiction and nonaddiction to narcotics, it was found that both Blacks and Whites used significantly more cocaine ($p<.01$) and barbiturates ($p<.05$) during periods of narcotic addiction. In addition, Blacks used significantly less marijuana ($p<.05$) during periods of active addiction to narcotics. A similar tendency was found among

Whites, but the difference failed to reach accepted levels of statistical significance.

Relationships Between Nonnarcotic Drug Use and Criminal Activity

As noted earlier, each of the six crime-days measures was correlated (product-moment r) with each of the nonnarcotic drug use rates listed in Tables 1 and 2. Since race and narcotic addiction status were found to be potent moderator variables, four sets of relationships were explored corresponding to the four possible combinations of race and narcotic addiction status.

Among Blacks during periods of active addiction to narcotics, cocaine use was positively correlated with theft ($r=.23$, $p<.002$), dealing ($r=.22$, $p<.003$), confidence games ($r=.40$, $p<.0001$), and total crime-days ($r=.39$, $p<.0001$). Amphetamine use was correlated positively with dealing ($r=.15$, $p<.04$) and with confidence games ($r=.14$, $p<.05$). Benzodiazepine use was negatively correlated with theft ($r=-.15$, $p<.05$) as well as with total crime-days ($r=-.19$, $p<.01$). Quaalude use was positively correlated with violent crime ($r=.14$, $p<.05$). Total use of nonnarcotic drugs was positively correlated with theft ($r=.16$, $p<.03$), dealing ($r=.18$, $p<.02$), confidence games ($r=.30$, $p<.0001$), and total crime-days ($r=.35$, $p<.0001$).

Among Whites during periods of active addiction to narcotics, barbiturate use was positively correlated with dealing ($r=.18$, $p<.03$), as was the use of benzodiazepines ($r=.19$, $p<.02$) and inhalants ($r=.15$, $p<.06$). Placidyl use was positively correlated with confidence games ($r=.19$, $p<.02$), while quaalude use was

positively correlated with theft ($r=.15$ $p<.06$). Total nonnarcotic drug use was positively correlated with dealing ($r=.18$, $p<.03$), but not with total crime-days. Interestingly enough, no significant associations between cocaine use and criminal activity were noted among Whites during their periods of active narcotic addiction.

Among Blacks during periods of nonaddiction to narcotics, cocaine use was positively correlated with theft ($r=.23$, $p<.004$). Barbiturate use was positively correlated with theft ($r=.17$, $p<.03$), dealing ($r=.32$, $p<.0001$), confidence games ($r=.59$, $p<.0001$), and total crime-days ($r=.36$, $p<.0001$). Marijuana use was positively correlated with dealing ($r=.22$, $p<.005$), as was total use of nonnarcotic drugs ($r=.23$, $p<.004$).

Among Whites during periods of nonaddiction to narcotics, use of marijuana was positively correlated with theft ($r=.22$, $p<.005$), as was use of barbiturates ($r=.32$, $p<.0001$), inhalants ($r=.46$, $p<.0001$), and total use of nonnarcotic drugs ($r=.24$, $p<.004$). Benzodiazepine use was positively correlated with dealing ($r=.16$, $p<.05$), as was use of hallucinogens ($r=.30$, $p<.0001$) and phenergan ($r=.31$, $p<.0001$). Barbiturate use also correlated positively with confidence games ($r=.25$, $p<.002$), as did use of amphetamines ($r=.48$, $p<.0001$), meprobamate ($r=.17$, $p<.04$), placidyl ($r=.17$, $p<.04$), and other nonnarcotic substances ($r=.17$, $p<.04$). Total crime-days was positively correlated with use of hallucinogens ($r=.22$, $p<.007$), inhalants ($r=.16$, $p<.05$), phenergan ($r=.24$, $p<.003$), and total nonnarcotic drug use ($r=.15$, $p<.06$). As before with Whites, no association between

cocaine use and criminal activity was found.

The foregoing analyses involving zero-order correlations were bivariate in scope and essentially of an exploratory nature. A more multivariate approach was pursued by determining the multiple correlation between each of the crime-days measures, in turn, and a subset of the nonnarcotic drug use measures. As before, the data were first subdivided by race and narcotic addiction status. In choosing the subset of nonnarcotic drug use measures (independent variables) to be used in each of the four sets of analyses, the only consideration was that the mean usage for the nonnarcotic drug had to be at least 1.65 times its standard error. This multiplier will be recognized as the cutting point for the 95% confidence interval for a one-tailed test, assuming a normal distribution. The value of 1.65 rather than the two-tailed value of 1.96 was used since rates could not be less than zero.

Blacks During Periods of Active Addiction to Narcotics

For this race/narcotic addiction status combination, five nonnarcotic drugs had mean usage rates at least 1.65 times their standard errors: marijuana, amphetamines, barbiturates, cocaine, and benzodiazepines. These five drugs were used as the independent (predictor) variables in the multiple regression analyses that follow.

Using theft as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .28 ($p<.01$), was obtained. The largest contributor to the prediction was cocaine use ($p<.002$); however, absence of the

use of benzodiazepines was also marginally significant ($p<.07$). The remaining three variables did not make significant independent contributions to the prediction equation.

Using dealing as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .25 ($p<.04$) was obtained. As with theft, cocaine use had the only statistically significant relationship with dealing ($p<.02$), although benzodiazepine use once again had a negative weight.

Using confidence games as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .41 ($p<.0001$) was obtained. As before, cocaine use was the only significant contributor to the prediction ($p<.0001$), with benzodiazepine use again having a negative weight.

Using total crime as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .44 ($p<.0001$) was obtained. Three of the predictor variables yielded significant or marginally significant regression weights, namely, cocaine use ($p<.0001$); absence of benzodiazepine use ($p<.008$); and marijuana use ($p<.06$). The two multiple regression equations involving violence and other crime as the dependent variables did not approach statistical significance.

Whites During Periods of Active Addiction to Narcotics

For this race/narcotic addiction status combination, six nonnarcotic drugs met the criterion for inclusion: marijuana, cocaine, barbiturates, amphetamines, benzodiazepines, and hallucinogens. These six drugs were used as the independent (predictor) variables in the multiple regression analyses that follow.

Using dealing as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation

of .31 ($p<.02$) was obtained. Significant predictor variables were use of barbiturates ($p<.02$) and benzodiazepines ($p<.02$). The five remaining multiple regression equations all failed to attain statistical significance.

Blacks During Periods of Nonaddiction to Narcotics

For this race/narcotic addiction status combination, six nonnarcotic drugs met the criterion for inclusion: marijuana, cocaine, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, hallucinogens, and quaaludes. These six drugs were used as the independent (predictor) variables in the multiple regression analyses that follow.

Using theft as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .30 ($p<.02$) was obtained. Cocaine use ($p<.003$) and barbiturate use ($p<.03$) were found to contribute significantly to the prediction equation.

Using dealing as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .40 ($p<.0001$) was obtained. Barbiturate use ($p<.0001$) and marijuana use ($p<.002$) contributed significantly to the prediction equation.

Using confidence games as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .61 ($p<.0001$) was obtained. Barbiturate use was found to be the only significant contributor to the prediction equation ($p<.0001$).

Using total crime as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .40 ($p<.0001$) was obtained. Barbiturate use ($p<.0001$) and cocaine use ($p<.03$) contributed significantly to the prediction equation. The two multiple regression equations

involving violence and other crime as the dependent variables did not approach statistical significance.

Whites During Periods of Nonaddiction to Narcotics

For this race/narcotic addiction status combination, four nonnarcotic drugs met the criterion for inclusion: marijuana, barbiturates, amphetamines, and benzodiazepines. These four drugs were used as the independent (predictor) variables in the multiple regression analyses that follow.

Using theft as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .47 ($p<.0001$) was obtained. Barbiturate use was the largest significant contributor to the prediction ($p<.0001$), with absence of amphetamine use ($p<.0003$) and use of marijuana ($p<.002$) also yielding significant regression weights.

Using confidence games as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .53 ($p<.0001$) was obtained. Use of amphetamines ($p<.0001$) and absence of barbiturate use ($p<.02$) made significant contributions to the prediction equation.

Using total crime as the dependent variable, a multiple correlation of .26 ($p<.04$) was obtained. Benzodiazepine use ($p<.05$) made the only significant independent contribution to this equation. The three multiple regression equations involving violence, dealing, and other crime did not approach statistical significance.

DISCUSSION

Several important conclusions may legitimately be drawn from the foregoing analyses. First, the use of nonnarcotic

drugs is very widespread among narcotic addicts, especially during periods of active addiction to narcotics. Second, both the pattern and extent of nonnarcotic drug use is a function of race (Black/White) as well as whether or not the individual is actively addicted to narcotics. Third, there is a tremendous degree of variability among narcotic addicts with respect to pattern and extent of nonnarcotic drug use; this is particularly true among Whites, where the variability associated with nonnarcotic drug use is typically much greater than that found among Blacks. Fourth, it seems clear that the use of certain nonnarcotic drugs is associated with the commission of certain types of crime, again depending on race and narcotic addiction status. In particular, cocaine use appears to be associated with increased criminal activity among Blacks but not among Whites, a finding consistent with that of Chambers, Taylor, and Moffett.[12] Barbiturate use was associated with greater criminal activity in both races, while benzodiazepine use was associated with increased criminal activity among Whites and lessened criminal activity among Blacks. In a similar vein, use of hallucinogens was correlated with increased criminal activity among Whites but not among Blacks. Finally, with respect to all of these associations, causality cannot be proven. The most that can be said is that, depending on race and narcotic addiction status, users of certain nonnarcotic drugs tend to commit certain types of crime more frequently than do nonusers.

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Table 1

Summarizing Statistics Concerning Nonnarcotic Drug Use Per Year at Risk by Narcotic Addicts During Periods of Active Narcotic Addiction

	Blacks (N=195)			Whites (N=159)		
Drug	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
Amphetamines	3.24	19.71	0-183	44.17*	260.94	0-2986
Barbiturates	15.03	73.48	0-674	84.46**	301.02	0-2986
Benzodiazepines	6.58	25.55	0-156	9.91	69.47	0-730
Chloral Hydrate	0.33	4.67	0-65	0.00	0.00	0
Cocaine	134.66	573.42	0-6570	158.52	547.05	0-4258
Doriden	0.33	4.67	0-65	0.86	7.38	0-71
Hallucinogens	0.95	8.42	0-109	2.26	11.38	0-109
Inhalants	0.01	0.08	0-1	0.20	1.77	0-21
Marijuana	174.15	558.75	0-4533	135.14	495.74	0-4563
Meprobamate	0.00	0.00	0	0.06	0.78	0-10
Phenergan	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0
Phenothiazines	0.03	0.36	0-5	0.00	0.00	0
Placidyl	0.00	0.00	0	0.09	1.14	0-14
Quaaludes	0.65	7.74	0-107	5.34	58.26	0-730
Other Nonnarcotics	1.02	14.18	0-198	0.01	0.13	0-2
All Nonnarcotics	336.99	819.20	0-6674	441.04	896.61	0-5974

*Significantly higher than corresponding mean for Blacks at .05 level.
**Significantly higher than corresponding mean for Blacks at .01 level.

Table 2

Summarizing Statistics Concerning Nonnarcotic Drug Use Per Year at Risk by Narcotic Addicts During Periods of Nonaddiction to Narcotics

	Blacks (N=165)			Whites (N=154)		
Drug	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
Amphetamines	0.63	6.19	0-78	16.15**	73.01	0-653
Barbiturates	5.04	38.48	0-374	25.19**	87.88	0-653
Benzodiazepines	3.79	20.18	0-198	17.72*	86.58	0-730
Chloral Hydrate	0.00	0.00	0	0.31	3.12	0-37
Cocaine	13.12	87.69	0-1095	24.90	249.66	0-3080
Doriden	0.00	0.00	0	4.93	48.26	0-572
Hallucinogens	0.24	1.73	0-17	11.12	89.29	0-1095
Inhalants	0.00	0.00	0	0.13	1.04	0-10
Marijuana	261.08	903.81	0-6935	295.13	1799.96	0-21900
Meprobamate	0.00	0.00	0	3.87	46.83	0-581
Phenergan	0.00	0.00	0	2.37	29.41	0-365
Phenothiazines	0.00	0.00	0	0.01	0.05	0-1
Placidyl	0.00	0.00	0	0.50	6.01	0-74
Quaaludes	1.63	12.59	0-122	6.96	61.04	0-730
Other Nonnarcotics	0.00	0.00	0	1.78	22.06	0-274
All Nonnarcotics	285.52	912.96	0-7085	411.06	1843.61	0-22005

*Significantly higher than corresponding mean for Blacks at .05 level
**Significantly higher than corresponding mean for Blacks at .01 level

END